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JrCOSTEP- Summer 2005
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Tucson Area Indian Health Service



Photo: Ensigns Laura Hunter and Chyla Hunter, inspecting a swimming pool in the San Xavier area.

My JrCOSTEP in Tucson, AZ, in the summer of 2005 with the Indian Health Service, has been one of the greatest opportunities I've experienced so far in my life. I was lucky enough to have had a preceptor, Quanah Nail, who was friendly, patient, and willing to show me a diverse experience on the Tohono O'odham reservation. Everyone on staff was always helpful and friendly. I became very good friends with the other COSTEPS and we had many great adventures in the Southwest. There is an amazing amount of activities to do out here, especially compared to my home in Missouri. We visited Rocky Point, Mexico, Tombstone, AZ, Las Vegas, NV, and the Grande Canyon.

The week that I arrived, the annual rabies clinic was scheduled. I missed three out of the first five days to go to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base to receive my ID badge, I had to attend a desert safety training, and also HIPPA training. The rest of the week and the following week I accompanied my preceptor, a fellow COSTEP, and an Army veterinarian on the clinics. This was one of my favorite parts of the internship because I was able to view almost the entire reservation in less than two weeks. I was amazed at how different it was from my preconceptions. It was much larger than I anticipated and its southern boundary borders Mexico, making it the only reservation to have a border patrol station on it.

After the rabies clinic was over, Chyla and I were responsible for recording the information in a database in Excel. Once we finished that we decided to combine the information from the last three years and the present year into a larger database in Access so that the information is more easily accessible. With our database, a keyword can be typed into one category or more than one to bring up a specific, family, last name,

district, or village, making the investigation of dog bites easier. This was a somewhat difficult task because we had never used Access before, but a few days of trial and error, we were successful. We left instructions for future COSTEPS on how to use it so that there can be an updated version each year.

The rest of the summer was a combination of accompanying my preceptor, Quanah Nail, and my fellow COSTEP'S preceptor Don Williams, on food surveys, food handling classes and pool surveys. Most places were clean, especially in the casinos. The biggest problem on the reservation was that people would sell food basically from their tailgates, making it hard to verify where it came from and how it was handled. Quanah and I even taught a class at someone's home. They were planning on selling food out of there kitchen until a grant came through for them to build one outside of the house. Two interesting incidences were that during the rabies clinics, we encountered a full-blooded, domesticated wolf. It was very tame and we recommended that they have it spayed so that it would not breed with their other dogs, which were Pitt Bulls. The two breeds mixing could result in an overaggressive dog. Another day we accompanied JJ Schmitz to investigate a case of a three year old girl with levels of lead in her blood. We found that the pipes outside of the house, leading to the kitchen sink were made of lead. Our samples of the water and some of the soil outside the house did show levels of lead, but very low. They recommended having the pipes replaced.

My COSTEP experience in Tucson, AZ was one of the greatest summers of my life. It was a valuable experience where I made great contacts and great friends. I plan on doing another one next summer if possible and want to pursue a career with the Public Health Service. I highly recommend doing a COSTEP because it reaffirmed my desire to have an Environmental Health career. It is a great way to see how you will apply what you learned in the classroom to real life situations. I was not sure if I wanted to work for the PHS and doing a COSTEP is one way of finding out if that is that career path is what you are looking for in job. I am very proud of what I accomplished and what I learned while working for the Tucson Area Indian Health Service and will use those skills and experiences the rest of my career.